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Chapter 5---1-b

LAUNDERING AND BATHING

I have heard my grandmother Mrs. Mildred Shinaberry, who was born in 1843 and lived to be 93 years of age, tell many times how laundering was done in pioneer times. She said that when she was a girl that there were no wash boards, and if they had tubs at all they were wooden ones made at home. Some of the people washed their clothes at the brook by pounding them clean on a flat rock or board, others washed them by rubbing them between the hands, much as women today wash their fine fabrics, except they rubbed more vigorously.

Even after wash boards came into use, Mrs. Shinaberry would not use one, but continued to wash by rubbing the clothes with her hands. I have seen her do it many times, and she could put out a wash almost as quickly as if she had used a board. The first wash board they had in the family was a home made one, made by cutting grooves across a large board. This board was used by the girls of the family. The first wash board they ever bought was for their youngest daughter Lucy around 1900. Many families, however, who lived nearer stores and lines of wagon transportation had factory made boards sooner than this.

I have talked with many of the older citizens of the county and they all say that laundering was done in this manner by all of the pioneers.

The soap was also home made. They built what they called an ash-hopper. This was made by placing boards v shaped into a trough made out of a log. It was lined with straw, and the ashes were put into this hopper. When spring came, water was poured, daily, into the ashes. It drained down through the ashes and the product that came out was a kind of lye used in the making of soap. When a sufficient amount of lye was obtained, they poured it into great iron kettles along with grease and other things, the product was what they called soft soap. This was poured into barrels and was used for laundering and all cleaning purposes. Some of the old timers tell me that they even used it for washing the hair and they suppose for bathing as well as they cannot remember any other kind of soap. Many say however that there was toilet soap as far back as they can remember. Since this soap did not have a very pleasant odor, they tried to scent it by stirring it with a sassafras stick or by pouring sassafras tea into the kettle. And by the way sassafras tea, to drink in the spring of the year, has always been a favorite drink for the people of this county, still is for many of the farm people, and it is very good.

This soft soap was hard on the hands, but it brought out the dirt and that was what the pioneer women wanted. I can remember soap making day, and when I was a girl, it was my job to keep water in the ash-hopper, though I have not seen one of these old hoppers for at least twenty years. Those who still make their own soap make a hard soap and they use concentrated lye. Hard wood ashes were used, hickory ashes were preferred.

Most of these pioneers did not launder their clothes as often as we do today. They did not see any sense in putting on clean clothing as often as we do today.

Bathing was not done so often either. Bathing facilities were poor and the pioneer was a busy preson who worked from before daylight until after dark in his struggle for a livelihood, therefore, they did not have so much time for bathing. Most of the men did their bathing at the creek in summer, and they did little of it during the winter months except to wash the hands and face and occasionally the feet. Even I can remember when old folks thought it would kill you to take a bath or to wash your head from about the first of November until the first of April. It just wasnt done. Even in summer they did not take a bath more than once a week or wash their hair more than once a month. In the very earliest times, women and children, perhaps too, did most of their bathing in the creek, but most of it was done in the wash tub or a wooden trough. Water was heated in kettles and poured into the tub. It was no little task to take a bath, and this was one reason it was not done any oftener, for usually the water had to be carried quite a distance. Bathing in the tub was usually performed in the kitchen and on Saturday afternoons so they would be ready for church in Sunday morning.

In farm homes where there are no modern bathing facilities such as town and city people have, bathing is still performed in pretty much the old pioneer way. Though it is in most homes performed much oftener than formerly, as even

rural people

have become educated to sanitation. Only the lack of money or the lack of sufficient water have kept them from having more modern facilities. Farm men still use the old swimming hole as a bath tub, in summer. Sponge baths are taken by many when they do not want to take time to heat a tub of water.

I wrot this only after talking with many of the oldest citizens of the county, though I was reared on a farm and have taught in rural communities therefore, I knew before I ask them just about what I would get for an answer.